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Unity of Sentential Meaning: Bhartrhari's Approach to the Indivisibility Thesis

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Abstract: A doyen of profound discussions on the Indian philosophy of language, Bhartrhari (fl. 500 – 700 CE) introduced in the light of the Advaita Vedanta system of philosophy a major theory known as the indivisibility thesis (*akhaṇḍapakṣavāda*) of meaning. His expertise in Sanskrit grammar rooted in the time-honored tradition bolstered with applied approach to the language in use enabled him to establish firmly this theory. Some later grammarians in the mainstream Pāṇinian grammatical tradition and Vedantic philosophers modelled their theories on Bhartrhari's approach to sentential meaning, while some others criticized him for misusing the Advaita Vedantic theology and its standard line of arguments in order to justify the indivisibility of meaning, whereas primacy of words cannot be ascertained in any context of language use. This paper examines the background of Bhartrhari's arguments for the legitimacy of his claim that sentence meaning is the primary entity, which is divisible neither syntactically nor semantically. It also seeks to justify that his approach to the indivisibility thesis deserves a significant position among the early thoughts on the derivation of meaning and its composition.

Key words: Sentential Meaning, Bhartrhari, indivisibility thesis (*akhaṇḍapakṣavāda*), Sanskrit grammar, Indian philosophy of language

1 Introduction

Bhartrhari considered to have flourished between the fifth and seventh centuries CE in India could be the most significant linguist who had a clearly distinguishable philosophy of his own. Several works have been ascribed to Bhartrhari since the Bhartrhari who was a philosopher-grammarian is also believed to be the Bhartrhari who wrote several poetical works. However, the VP (*Vākyapadīya*), which literally means 'one that treats of sentence(s) and word(s)' alias the *Trikaṇḍī*, i.e. 'one that is constituted of three sections' is the most momentous treatise by Bhartrhari. Despite numerous uncertainties¹ about his date, Bhartrhari can be introduced as a Sanskrit grammarian of the mainstream initiated by Pāṇini plus a philosopher of the non-dualistic (Advaita) Vedānta tradition. Further, he stands significant in the history of Indian philosophy of language and grammar because he was a firm upholder of the

language in flux and its practical usage. Unlike most of the Sanskrit grammarians attempted to impose rules to rectify, limit or even to stop the flux of the language, Bhartrhari observed the language flow in keeping with the changes in anthropological, social and cultural settings it is used in and then provided it with a philosophical interpretation. He did not tolerate clinging blindly to the already established normative grammar which is purposively taught to a language user but rather promoted the practicality of the language and the benefits of learning the language as it has been in practice. Bhartrhari's philosophy of language is neither entirely separated from nor merged into Advaita Vedānta school of Indian philosophy. Given the logical organization of its content, his system of philosophy was one with its own identity remodeled by Bhartrhari himself but its underlying structure was borrowed from the well-established Advaita Vedānta tradition. However, this is not to exaggerate that Bhartrhari individually established a completely novel school of philosophy without being influenced by his predecessors at all. Rather, he developed a new line of thoughts on the language and grammar and shaped it in the mould of Advaita Vedānta so that it could stand on its own feet with due respect to the traditionalism.² That new line of thoughts has such an account of peculiar characteristics that it deserves to be designated as a new philosophy. This paper examines the background of Bhartrhari's arguments for the legitimacy of his claim that sentence meaning is the primary entity, which is divisible neither syntactically nor semantically, akin to the non-duality in Vedānta. It also seeks to justify that his approach to the indivisibility thesis deserves a significant position among the early thoughts on the derivation of meaning and its composition.

One finds three terms in the VP that must not be misinterpreted in the light of their English counterparts. Out of them it is vital in interpreting and understanding the philosophy of Bhartrhari that we first have very clear understanding of what the '*śabda*' and the '*vākya*' are. Literally translated, they are the 'sound' and the 'sentence' respectively. The Sanskrit grammarians of the

¹ Coward & Raja, 1990, p. 22; Houben, 1995, pp. 3-10; Iyer, 1969, p. 3; Śāstrī, 1959, p. 56.

² For Bhartrhari's respect to the tradition, see: VP. 2. 485 - 487.



Pāṇinian tradition including Patañjali³ primarily use them in that sense. Bhartṛhari does not entirely deviate from his predecessors' path but in his system of philosophy expands the semantic scope of both terms so that each includes two senses as discussed below. The other term, 'vyākaraṇa', is also bisemous but the sense more frequently and emphatically employed is 'the natural way of language use' which fully accords with social convention rather than 'the grammar' normatively followed without enough concern about its practical application.

The *śabda*, for Bhartṛhari, is both (a) the audible sounds we orally produce and listen to and (b) the eternal speech principle, the cause of the real world or the *sphoṭa*. Consequently, he tends to use the terms *dhvani* and *nāda* synonymously⁴ when he refers only to the former sense by the term '*śabda*'. Since Bhartṛhari's major focus is on the latter sense, his philosophy is also known as the '*Śabdādvaitavāda*', the theory of the non-duality of the eternal speech principle. The *śabda* as found in his philosophy is a lavish improvement of what Patañjali refers to as '*nityaśabda*'. The *vākya* also bears the sense 'the eternal speech principle' in addition to its general sense, the sentence. This is of utmost significance in Bhartṛhari's philosophy since taking the *vākya* to be the eternal speech principle, the *śabda* or the *sphoṭa* is the foundation on which he establishes that 'the idea' we understand from a linguistic expression cannot be divided into constituents. As a result, it is inaccurate and misleading to interpret that Bhartṛhari only postulates the 'indivisibility of the sentence as a string of linguistic components'.

2 The Vākya

Bhartṛhari's reinterpretation of the '*vākya*' is the distinguished subject matter of the complete VP. The *kārikās* VP. 2. 325 - 327 succinctly state that to have a *samāptārtha* or a 'perfected meaning'⁵ is the essential quality for any linguistic form to become, in Bhartṛhari's usage of the term, a *vākya*. Having acquired this quality, any linguistic form which can syntactically be distinguished as a

morpheme, word, phrase, clause or a sentence only in grammatical analysis, becomes so semantically saturated that it never desires such another unit (or more units) to perfect its meaning.⁶ Similarly, put the other way round, if a certain linguistic unit is capable of bringing forth a 'complete unified meaning', it never matters whether the unit in question is 'a constituent of a sentence' (noun, verb, adjective, preposition etc.) or a 'collection of such elements', i.e. sentence. What matters is thus whether or not the very unit could give us a 'perfected meaning' (*samāptārtha*).⁷ Further, the 'sentence' needs not to be a series of linguistic forms since even one word could bear a rounded-up meaning without expectancy for any more.⁸ What follows is a brief discussion on this matter.

I suggest that the English term 'sentence' may become quite misleading, in the sense 'semantically incomprehensive', in defining the term *vākya* in Sanskrit. Likewise, to render '*vākya* holism' acceptable to Bhartṛhari as '*sentence* holism'⁹ might muddle up the entire indivisibility thesis. The English terms in this regard such as 'sentence, assertion, proposition¹⁰ or statement'

6 VPpr (Vākyapadīya: Helārāja's Commentary - Prakāśa). 2. 318: further includes the following.

na hi kiñcit padaṃ nāma rūpeṇa nīyataṃ kvacit | padānāmartharūpaṃ ca vākyaḥ

(There is nothing known as a word with a fixed form. The meaning of the words and their forms arise from the sentential meaning itself).

7 VPpr. 2. 326 confirms that *samāptārtha* is *paripūrṇārtha*. Here *caritakriya* or the embedded semantic move in the form of the predicate is discussed.

8 In VP. 2. 445 - 447, it is discussed whether the comprehension of the perfected sentential meaning expects the all linguistic forms being heard or the all semantic moves (*kriyā*) being understood. Since a semantic move like 'cooking' may include a series of other semantic moves such as washing the cooking utensils, chopping vegetables etc. but is understood as including them all, the 'reciprocal desire of the linguistic units for more such units to become semantically saturated (*ākāṅkṣā*)' ceases to exist even when such linguistic units of those semantic moves are not physically heard.

9 This is how most writers introduce *akhaṇḍapakṣavāda* in Bhartṛhari's terminology, which does not provide enough clarity to the confusion whether they employ the term '*sentence*' only considering the surface literary sense of the *vākya* in Sanskrit or also including its extended sense as in the VP. Cf. Bhattacharya, 2002, p. 61; Ganeri, 2001, p. 111; Matilal, 1990, p. 106; Patnaik, 1994, p. 139.

10 Since what is intended by the term 'proposition' is not exactly fixed, many writers on Bhartṛhari use it with caution to denote what is intended by the Sanskrit term

3 Patañjali takes the *śabda* to be the audible sounds (*dhvani*) by means of pronouncing which the understanding of the thing-meant becomes possible. MBh (Mahābhāṣya). 1. 1. 6 - 13.

4 Iyer, 1982, p. 43.

5 Cf. VP. 2. 326; 2. 450; 3. 701: This English rendering of the Sanskrit term *samāptārthatā* may be quite similar to that of '*perfecta oratio*' as explained by the medieval philosopher Peter Abelard but we need more in-depth studies before we can say if they are genuine parallels. See: Gaskin, 2008, p. 23; Kelly, 2002, p. 166.



have their own demarcations in terms of the current usage in common unspecified contexts and none of them is exactly identical to the Sanskrit term *vākya* in a number of aspects. The term *vākya* might be introduced with a special combination of some of the criteria that decide what is referred to by the English terms cited above but it would be far better if we attempt to define the *vākya* after recognizing its own properties.

2. 1 Definitions of the Vākya before Bhartṛhari

The most obvious fact given in any general definition of the English term 'sentence' is that 'a series of linguistic components makes a sentence'.¹¹ In other words, syntactical relations must play the major role in defining what a sentence is.¹² The philosophers before Bhartṛhari too were of the opinion that a set of words build up a sentence because their foci lay more strongly on the grammatical perfection rather than the semantic unambiguousness of an expression. From the Nyāya philosophers¹³ to the logicians of the recent history like Annambhaṭṭa¹⁴ and

'*vākya*'. Cf. Aklujkar, 2001, p. 471. fn. 31. However, 'proposition' as explicated in the western philosophical discourses on the language may well sit close to the *vākya* in its broadest sense as discussed above. Further research on the accuracy of employing *vākya* and 'proposition' indiscriminately is necessary to confirm or reject this likely conformity though some scholars have already employed the term 'proposition' to translate some Sanskrit terms in the Indian philosophy of language and logic; for example: *vākya* in Bhartṛhari's linguistic monism as 'complete self-contained proposition' [Sāstrī, 1980, p. 22; Mīśra, 1972, p. 321], *atideśavākya*, *udāharaṇa* and *siddhaparavākya* in logic as 'assimilative proposition, universal proposition and assertive proposition conveying something that is already descriptive' respectively [Grimes, 1989, pp. 67, 227, 292 respectively], *pratijñā* in Nyāya logic as 'proposition' [Worthington, 1982, p. 65]. Cf. Gaskin, 2008, pp. 8-14: 'proposition' as employed by the medieval philosophers and their predecessors, not in the sense modern analytical philosophers use it.

¹¹ However, the original etymology of the term 'sentence' appears not to be limited to the sense 'a series of linguistic components or a construction with a finite verb' but to be rather rich in the sense the term *vākya* bears. Sentence < Latin *sentire* (to feel), *sententia* (thought, meaning, judgment, opinion) < PIE **sent-* (to take a direction, go; to feel). Cf. Pokorny, 1959, 908.

¹² Tesnière, 1959, p. 14; Bloomfield, 1933, p. 184; Chomsky, 1957, 3.

¹³ NM (*Nyāyamañjarī*). 2. 143 *kimapi punaridaṃ padaṃ nāma, kiñca vākyamityuktamatra varṇasamūho padaṃ padasamūho vākyamiti* (Again, what is this known as a word? why is it said to be a sentence? A set of syllables is a word and a set of words a sentence).

¹⁴ TarS (*Tarkasaṅgraha*), Tripathi & Bhandare edition, 1974, p. 50.

Laugākṣibhāskara,¹⁵ many took the sentence to be 'a set of words' (*padasamūha*) or a collection of syntactically individual constituents. The very idea that philosophers are not satisfied with what grammarians accept as 'being perfect' is a widespread notion in the Indian philosophy of language as well.¹⁶ Grammatical perfection in a certain linguistic expression does not invariably stand for its 'entire perfection' as the latter type of perfection lies beyond the 'taught-and-learned' rules of prescriptive grammar. Thus, the sheer syntactical combination of a grammatical subject, an object and a verb is not always taken to be semantically perfect though that very set of words may be strictly following all the necessities of grammatical syntax. Kaundabhaṭṭa, a leading figure in the Indian philosophy of grammar, elucidates this facet of the language in the *Nāmārthanirṇaya* section of his *Vaiyākaraṇabhūṣaṇa* by using a number of examples on how a grammatically accurate sentence might look absurd in terms of semanticity. Similarly, a language can also include the words for the things unreachable by the mind or not existent such as *vandhyāputra* (barren woman's son), *śaśaviṣāṇa* (hare's horn), *khaṇḍapūṣpa* / *ākāśapūṣpa* / *gaganakusuma* (flower in the firmament)¹⁷ or circular square.¹⁸

The Mīmāṃsā philosophers make use of three major criteria necessary for the semantic perfection of a linguistic expression, namely; *ākāṅkṣā* (reciprocal desire for more units),¹⁹ *yogyatā* (logical consistency) and *āsatti* or *sannidhi* (logical proximity) more skillfully in their exposition of

¹⁵ TK (*Tarkakaumudī*). Chatterji edition, 1982, 44.

¹⁶ Cf. Strawson, 1992, p. 7. '[J]ust as the grammarian ...labours to produce a systematic account of the structure of rules which we effortlessly observe in speaking grammatically, so the philosopher labors to produce a systematic account of the *general conceptual structure* of which our daily practice shows us to have a tacit and unconscious mastery...' [my emphasis italicized].

¹⁷ Cf. BṛU (*Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*). 1. 2. 1 *na hi bhavati gaganakusumacchanno vandhyāputra iti* ; MU (*Muṇḍakopaniṣad*). 7. 3. 28 *vandhyāputro na tattvena māyayā vāpi jāyate* ; Also Cf. YV (*Yogavasiṣṭha*). 3. 7. 20; 4. 74, 75 and profusely in the Buddhist works like LS (*Laṅkāvatārasūtra*). 2. 27 *khaṇḍapūṣpa*, 2. 164 *vandhyāputra*.

¹⁸ Matilal, 1968, p. 20; Raja, 1969, p. 165.

¹⁹ MS (*Mīmāṃsāsūtra*). 2. 1. 46 *arthaikatvādekam vākyam sākāṅkṣam ced vibhāge syāt* Bhartṛhari also accepts that the 'sentence' is a semantically single unit where reciprocal desire of the sentential components for more components in quest of perfection is satisfied. Cf. VP. 2. 4 *sākāṅkṣāvayavam bhede parānākāṅkṣaśabdakam* [karmapradhānam guṇavadekārtham vākyamiṣyate Cf. VP. 2. 48.



meaning. The first two share the properties of both the constituents and the perceiver's process of understanding while the third can be a property either of physical syntax or mental syntax. Even if a linguistic expression might have already acquired all grammatical necessities for accuracy, it might be lacking 'perfection' in semantic terms. A later logician Keśavamīśra in his *Tarkabhāṣā* 20 also asserts the significance of the aforementioned threefold criteria of 'a set of words' if it is to be accepted as a *vākya* which is saturated both grammatically and semantically. Thus, as Kumārīlabhaṭṭa²¹ rightly points out, the *vākya* is not only what the traditional Sanskrit grammarians called it to be but also something more. These criteria and their functions elevate an expression, be it grammatically saturated or not, to a semantically perfect *vākya* but it is not attempted to explain them here in detail.²²

When defining the *vākya*, the ancient Indian grammarians attempted to find how different it is from the smaller linguistic units. Those units are primarily *padas* and *varṇas* i.e. words and syllables respectively. The grammarians' attempt was to consider the grammatical function of a *vākya* while their attention to its semantic aspect appears to have been relatively subordinate to the first. In his *Vārtika*, Kātyāyana introduces the *vākya* as '*ekatiṅ*' i.e. (a structure) with only one finite verb.²³ Although Pāṇini's *Samartha* theory of syntax²⁴ implies that a sentence may have more than one finite verb (*tiṅ*) as in the expression '*paśya, sūryaḥ udayati*' (look, the sun rises) which consists of an imperative and a finite verb describing the subject's

action, it is as such only when we consider the whole complex as a semantically single and indivisible unit. Syntactically, in the above example in Sanskrit, the imperative works as one simple sentence and the rest as another.²⁵ In Patañjali's interpretation, the imperative in such a sentence is the preliminary sentence which brings forth the meaning of whole expression. The rest remains as an adjectival phrase to the imperative.²⁶ That is to say that the verb *udayati* (rises) in the example becomes a participial attributive or acts adjectivally to *sūrya* (which is the object of the activity of looking at). Accordingly, our example may translate as 'look at the rising sun'.²⁷ Furthermore, the imperative '*paśya*' (look!) is wanting in an object as it can be questioned, for example, that 'what is it to look at' and also the affirmative '*(sūryaḥ) udayati*' may lead to the question that 'well, then what do you want me to do?' Consequently, both verb forms of that sentence expect each other and are required in order for the expression to convey the complete meaning. As for Bhartṛhari, in a sentence with only one verb form (*ekatiṅ*), the meaning cannot be comprehended unless that verb form is grasped. Consequently, such a sentence is marked by the *niyatalakṣaṇa* because of the singleness of the idea that the speaker desires to convey.²⁸ Bhartṛhari's position is therefore that, even though there can be several verb forms in a *vākya*, the unity of the semantic whole or the 'state of being a single *vākya*' (*ekavākyatā*) remains unaffected because it is the meaningfulness that is desired but not whether the *vākya* under discussion is in conformity with the normative grammatical structure.²⁹

20 TBh (*Tarkabhāṣā*) Paranjape edition, 2005, p. 121. *vākyam tu ākāṅkṣā-yogyatā-sannidhimatām padānām samūhaḥ*.

21 TV (*Tantravārtika*). 1. 455; the immediate sequence (*anantaraśruti*) of the sentence-components is not enough as these criteria as irreplaceable. *ākāṅkṣā samnidhānam ca yogyatā ceti ca trayam | sambandhakāraṇatvena kṛptaṃ nānantaraśrutiḥ*.

22 For a brief account with examples, see: Raja, 1969, pp. 151 – 169.

23 P (*Pāṇinīya Aṣṭādhyāyī*). 2. 1. 1.7; *Tiṅ* is the technical meta-term in Sanskrit grammar to introduce the identity of a 'finite verb'. *Tiṅ-anta* (that ends with a *-ti*) is thus a verb. Nouns are termed as '*sup-anta*' as the last case ending (locative plural) in declining nominal roots is '*-su*'. The special letters '*-ñ*' and '*-p*' appended to '*-ti*' and '*-su*' respectively are '*it*' letters which denote that the stems/ roots undergo further changes in line with the rules of conjugation and declension. Having a finite verb in the syntactic structure is also one of the key definitions of the English term 'sentence'.

24 P. 2. 1. 1 *samarthaḥ padavidhiḥ* ; 8. 1. 28 *tiṅatīnaḥ* ; For details, see: Mahavir, 1984, pp. 89-92, and Singh, 1997, p. 1587.

25 Among the linguists' definitions of the 'sentence', the pause preceding and following an uttered expression is also recognized as a significant criterion. Accordingly, if a certain piece of speech independent in terms of meaning is found between two pauses, that expression can be recognized as a sentence. See: Hirst & Cristo, 1998, pp. 175, 240, 284. The Pāṇinian example here can be understood as a single sentence composed of two sentences also because a pause is often made after this type of imperative in natural human speech.

26 MBh. I. 367. 10 - 368. 24 *ākhyātām sāvyayam sakārakam sakārakaviśeṣaṇam vākyasamjñam bhavati vaktavyam*

27 Cf. VPpr. 2. 444: for a discussion on another classic example; *mṛgaḥ paśyata yāti*.

28 VPpr. 2. 443 *niyatalakṣaṇamiti vivakṣitaikatvamityarthaḥ*.

29 VP. 2. 442, Cf. VPpr. on the same *kārikā* : *satsu api bahuṣu tiṅanteṣu arthasya sākāṅkṣatvāt tatraikavākyatā eva iṣyate*.



As regards the semantic function of a *vākya*, the Mīmāṃsakas including Jaimini and Śābarasvāmin strongly held the opinion that, as illustrated above, the unity of the meaning (*arthaikatva*) is the factor to decide if a set of words is a *vākya*. The essence of this view maintained by Mīmāṃsakas in general was acceptable to Bhartṛhari too even though he rejected the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas' view that the sentential meaning is to be understood in compliance with the *abhihitānvayavāda* or the 'theory of semantic signification antecedent to syntactic connection'.

2. 2 Definitions of the Vākya in the Vākyapadīya

The identity of the *vākya* was among the most vexed topics with which the philosophers and the grammarians at the time Bhartṛhari flourished had divergent preoccupations. Although his own overall treatment of the topic was rather different, Bhartṛhari succinctly summarizes in the very beginning of the *Vākyakāṇḍa* the definitions of the *vākya* up to his time by blending some of his views therewith.³⁰ The description is limited only to two *kārikās* followed by the author's gloss. A number of different readings and interpretations exist but the commentators are not in complete agreement with the content. However, as Puṇyarāja in his *Ṭīkā* commentary explains, eight definitions are commonly accepted to be included in those *kārikās*. Of them, only three definitions purely represent the 'semantic signification subsequent to syntactic connection theory' (*anvitābhīdhānavāda*). The rest associates with the Mīmāṃsakas' stance on the *vākya* where, however, Bhartṛhari's holistic view on the *vākya* (*akhaṇḍapakṣavāda*) is also moderately embedded. Below is how Puṇyarāja describes the division of the definitions into different categories.

- I. Semantic Signification subsequent to Syntactic Connection Theory (*Anvitābhīdhānavāda*)
 - a. *ākhyāta-śabda*
 - b. *pada-ādya*
 - c. *prthak sarvapada sākāṅkṣa*
 Doctrine of the Indivisibility of an expression (*akhaṇḍapakṣavāda*)
 - a. *jāti-saṅghātavartinī*
 - b. *eka-anavayava-śabda*
 - c. *buddhi-anusamhṛti*
- II. Semantic Signification antecedent to Syntactic Connection Theory (*Abhihitānvayavāda*)
 Doctrine of the Divisibility of an expression (*khaṇḍapakṣavāda*)

³⁰ VPpr. 2. 1. 2; Cf. Raja, 1969, pp. 206-210.

- a. *saṅghāta*
- b. *krama*

Each definition can be explained briefly as follows. The first three of the first category are in harmony with the form of the *anvitābhīdhānavāda* which Bhartṛhari partially favors in the VP while the next three definitions have strong affinity to the indivisibility thesis. The literal meaning of each definition is given in the parentheses.

1. *Ākhyāta-śabda* (expression with a finite verb)³¹

This is basically the position maintained by the Sanskrit grammarians in general; a *vākya* must have (at least) one finite verb on which other semantic units in the *vākya* depend whether its syntax is either physical or mental. Once the verb is located and its meaning gets fixed during the process of understanding, the other words get their own meanings as well. Therefore, this definition supports the *anvitābhīdhānavāda*. Further, as in the VPpr., a *vākya* where only one finite verb stands for the whole expression (as if one with only an imperative) makes sense through inference (*anumāna*)³² or implication (*ākṣepa*).³³

2. *Pada-ādya* (the word at the beginning)³⁴

As the very first word of a certain sentence may be capable of conveying its own meaning and its relation to other words in the sentence, that word per se can be recognized as a *vākya*. Such first words could be *vākyas* because they are highly contextualized and linked to the words in their syntactic vicinity. In the light of VPpr. 2. 17, we can imagine a situation as follows to instantiate this definition. There are two people, say A and B, who have been conscious of the only one cow seen nearby. By uttering some expressions such as 'drive the cow here', 'bring the cow' or 'tether her there', A asks B to perform the action intended.

³¹ VP. 2. 326, 327. Kātyāyana too believed that the verb 'acting as a *vākya*' could be considered to be a *vākya* itself. Cf. Kātyāyana on P. 2. 1. 1 *ākhyātaṃ sāvyayakāra-kaviśeṣaṇaṃ vākyaṃ*.

³² VP. 2. 189, 328, 371, 372.

³³ VP. 2. 200; 3. 14.73. Cf. Matilal and Sen, 1988, p. 88; Matilal, 1990, p. 110.

³⁴ Kumārilabhaṭṭa's definition of a *vākya* as the 'last word' (*padam-antyam*) relates to this definition. Logically, the last word better seems to link all preceding units and to bring forth the unified meaning of a *vākya*. However, a *vākya* needs not necessarily to be a 'set of words' as even a single word can be a *vākya* if the criteria for semantic perfection suffice. Therefore, in such a situation, there is neither a first-word nor a last-word due to the absence of a sequence (*krama*). For more disputations over and a detailed line of the arguments on this matter, see: Raja, 1969, p. 207 – 210.



Even if only the imperative is enunciated, since both the addresser and the addressee are physically present in the situation concerned and well aware of the context, upon hearing the command, B does not bother to find the object of the command (*viz.* the cow) or the properties of the object (*viz.* the cow's physical features etc.). Therefore, the only component of the addresser's expression which he pays his attention to is the imperative, the first word in each example above. Such first words are so highly saturated in meaning and contextualized that the subsequent rest only supports the first. As Bhartṛhari states, there is a view that the first word in such an expression can be defined as a *vākya*.

3. *Prthak sarvapada sākāṅkṣa* (all words individually desire each other)

As noted earlier, the reciprocal desire for perfection is the string that keeps the semantic units in a *vākya* connected together. When taken individually or separately (*prthak*), if such units still desire others in order to become meaningful, that original set of words is then a *vākya*. For instance, transitive verbs taken alone can hardly make sense by themselves as they often desire an object to perfect its meaning.

Interpreting the second and third definitions above, Bhartṛhari designates them as *viśeṣaśabda* (special expressions).³⁵

4. *Jāti-saṅghātavartinī* (universal current in the sequence of words)

Jāti is the universal or generic property of the referent. It is the generic form of the *vākya* that is independent of individual speakers' idiosyncratic ways of saying it. Further, meaning is not grasped at the most external, idiosyncratic level of speech (*vaikharī*) but at the most internal, universal level (*paśyantī*) thereof. A set of words becomes a *vākya* if it can be treated as an indivisible unit which refers to a proposition with universality. Simply put, this could be the opinion that such a set of words refers not to a specific proposition but often to an undifferentiated proposition as in the example 'the cat sat on the mat' which means 'any cat's natural sitting on any mat at any time' in general but not a particular cat's action in a given context. The Sanskrit grammarians after Bhartṛhari reintroduced this definition as the *jāti-sphoṭa*.

5. *Eka-anavayava-śabda* (unified expression devoid of constituents)³⁶

³⁵ VP. 2. 17; 3. 5. 4.
³⁶ VP. 2. 56.

This view appears to be somewhat akin to the *Jāti-saṅghātavartinī* because, by being introduced as an indivisible meaningful unit devoid of components, the *vākya* in reality is taken to be only one string of words though spoken by different speakers in different spatiotemporal settings. This definition is supportive of the *vākya-sphoṭa*.

6. *Buddhi-anusamṛti* (that which is retained in the mind)

Bhartṛhari takes this definition to be the one explaining the 'internal *sphoṭa*' or the innate flashing of the meaning on the mind. Therefore, the *vākya* is defined as a 'complete piece of cognitive awareness' (*avyabhicāriṇī ekārthatā*).³⁷ According to this definition, the meaning is not obstructed by syntactic permutations, speakers' idiosyncrasies or any other factor in the surface level but becomes subjected directly to the consciousness which is internal, self-perceived and unobservable by others.³⁸

7. *Saṅghāta* (collection of semantic units)

The Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas' straightforward doctrine of semantic signification antecedent to syntactic connections (*abhihitānvayavāda*) is well exemplified here. A *vākya* is a collection of semantic units and such units have their own meanings both before and after being connected together to form a *vākya*. However, the Mīmāṃsakas generally accept that the mutual connection (*saṃsarga*) of individual units adds an 'additional meaning' (*ādhikya*) to the *vākya*.³⁹ Hence, the meaning of a *vākya* is nothing else but the cumulative meaning of the individual semantic units (*aneka-pada-saṃśraya*)⁴⁰ plus the newly added meaning through mutual linkages. Clear is that this definition is the very opposite of the contextualism strongly held by the Prābhākaras.

8. *Krama* (sequence)⁴¹

The words uttered as a series with a temporal sequence is defined as a *vākya* and the *vakyārtha* results from that sequence. The Sanskrit grammarians hold that we understand a set of words as meaningful because of its sequence whereas the same collection of words may bear a different meaning or may not even make sense at

³⁷ Matilal, 1990, p. 97.

³⁸ Cf. VP. 2. 30 – 31.

³⁹ Cf. P. 2. 3. 50; MBh. I. 463. 9 - 464. 27 *yadatrādhikyaṃ vakyārthah saḥ* [the meaning of a *vākya* is what is additional (to the cumulative meaning of the constituents)] as given in VPpr. 2. 41 - 42; Cf. Iyer, 1983, p. 19.

⁴⁰ VP. 2. 42.

⁴¹ VP. 2. 49 – 53.



all when presented in different sequential permutations. However, since by *krama* is meant the temporal sequence and *krama* is relevant only to the words but not⁴² to the syllables constituting the words, understanding of the meaning may not significantly be affected by an irregular temporal sequence alone.⁴³

Though these eight definitions are generally accepted to be what Bhartṛhari listed simply in two *kārikās*, some are of the opinion that they contain more or fewer definitions. Kumārilabhaṭṭa's view that *krama* and *buddhyanusaṃhṛti* should be considered to be a single definition⁴⁴ is an example to the attempts to minimize the number of definitions originally acceptable to Bhartṛhari. By contrast, many others expanded Bhartṛhari's list up to as many definitions as ten or more. For instance, the Jaina recension of the VP, as made clear in the *Prameyakamalamārttaṇḍa* by Prabhācandra, includes not only the first word (*pada-ādya*) but also both the last word (*pada-antya*) and the word which expects another (*pada-sāpekṣa*) as possible definitions of the *vākya*.⁴⁵

3 Conclusion

Given these *vākya* definitions in the VP where the indivisibility of the *vākya* is philosophized, it is clear that Bhartṛhari endorses only the first six as those pertaining to his philosophy in different proportions. The last two originally from the Mīmāṃsakas are squarely rejected on the ground that they are not as supportive of the indivisible *vākya-sphoṭa* as the first six. Bhartṛhari approves neither the *khaṇḍapakṣa* (both the linguistic atomism and the compositionism) nor the form of contextualism put forth first by the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsakas.⁴⁶ Precisely put, his thesis is rather that the *vākya* is a piece of unified understanding which does not have any prima facie divisions at

the conceptual level experienced at the time of practical communication. Looked at from the speaker's viewpoint, it is the complete idea ready to be conveyed. Similarly, it is what becomes fully settled in the listener's mind when his understanding process completes.

Accordingly, the *vākya* is a linguistic construction which has reached 'the state of semantic self-sufficiency' and 'the absence of expectation for further units in order to achieve semantic perfection'. Hence, if even a single word is capable of conveying a complete meaning (*samāptārtha*) without resorting to further linguistic constituents for being semantically unambiguous, it can be considered a *vākya*. The classic example sentences, '*vrkṣa* (the tree)' and '*vrkṣaḥ tiṣṭhati* (there is a tree)' may well be two different *vākyas* with the potency of denoting two different meanings in keeping with their contexts.⁴⁷ Likewise, a single finite verb may also become a complete *vākya* as in '*varṣati*' (rains). It is 'a third person present active singular verb' in grammatical analysis but is saturated enough to convey the complete meaning of the longer sentence '*devo jalam varṣati*' (viz. 'the rain-giver deity or cloud showers water').⁴⁸ Now it should be evident that a *vākya* does not necessarily need to be a 'string of several linguistic units'. Thus, the English translation of the term *vākya* found particularly in the discourses on the philosophy of grammar should not be worded as 'a set of words or linguistic components' since doing so might both misinterpret the Sanskrit term and generate philosophical confusions.

This construal also avers that Bhartṛhari treats the individual linguistic constituents in a *vākya* as those observable only in analysis but not in

⁴² It is because the words can be arranged into sequences more easily and, in natural speech, the syllables are not articulated with a purposive pause.

⁴³ The Sequence as a significant factor in understanding the meaning is explained especially by philosopher-grammarians on the *sphoṭa* such as Maṇḍanaśāstra. A detailed account of this facet will be dealt with later. Cf. VP. 2. 115, 372, 379; Bhartṛhari employs the term *āvṛtti* to recognize the identity of the sequence. How the temporal pauses in pronunciation are treated as a criterion to distinguish between sentences was mentioned above.

⁴⁴ Cf. Pārthasārathimīśra in ŚV (*Ślokavārtika*) & NR (*Nyāyaratnākara*) *kramo buddhyanusaṃhṛtiritiyetanirākaroti varya iti*.

⁴⁵ PKM (*Prameyakamalamārttaṇḍa*). folio 134; Cf. Śarmā, 1990, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Matilal, 1990, p. 97.

⁴⁷ VP. 2. 332 *arthaprakaraṇābhyāṃ tu teṣāṃ svārtho niyamate*, Cf. VPpr. on the same *kārikā*.

Here are raised the questions, if a word like *vrkṣa* suffices to be considered as a *vākya*, why not to use it in all occasions and why to bother over longer *vākya-s*. The grammarians answer is that it is so owing to our preference for the economy of words (*lāghava*).

⁴⁸ VPpr. 2. 326; In the English declaratives like 'it rains', 'it snows' etc., the role of the subject word 'it' to convey the sense 'raining' or 'snowing' has also been debated among semanticists. Though grammatically required, whether the 'it' here is primary or ancillary has been a vital question as the finite verb 'rains' or 'snows' is capable enough to convey its complete sense.

Cf. European philosophers like Adam Smith argue for the 'perfect simplicity and unity' of the impersonal Latin verbs like *pluit* (it rains) and against their longer forms. But some others oppose that view by saying that such verbs do have subjects implied in their roots; for instance, the subject of *pluit* is 'rain' itself. Cf. Gaskin, 2008, pp. 30 – 31.



practical applications during communication.⁴⁹ He further exemplifies this thesis by means of comparing the so-called 'components' of the *vākya* to the human sense organs and the *vākya* to the well-functioning human body itself.⁵⁰ Just like the sense organs cannot function without the body the way they are supposed to, the linguistic components without being mutually connected as a *vākya* cannot produce a complete meaning and consequently will remain meaningless (*arthavattā-viraha*).

As understood from Bhartṛhari himself, his commentators and followers, a linguistic form marked by the semantic property *nirākāṅkṣā* 51 is then 'linguistically capable enough' to convey a complete meaning to the listener. However, a *vākya* free from further desire for semantic perfection may have also been supported considerably by the paralinguistic constituents of its signifier linguistic form(s) but Bhartṛhari does not explicitly discuss them. Though the VP deals with the language fundamentally in its spoken form rather than the written form, it does not provide any obvious interpretation to the paralinguistic features of human speech that could help a deficient expression compensate for its uncompleted meaning. However, Bhartṛhari's position is that the elliptical sentences (or, as against perfection, deficient sentences) and self-sufficient sentences are totally different expressions in terms of their syntactic construction observable upon analysis. Thus, the VP considers that the ellipsis (*vākyaśeṣa* / *vākyaādhyāhāra*) is understood in a variation of inference (*aprāptyanumāna*) by specific techniques such as exception (*apavāda*), specification (*viśeṣavidhi*) or prohibition (*pratiśedha*).⁵² Nevertheless, all in all Bhartṛhari never extends his clarification up to the paralinguistic properties such as volume, vocal pitch, intonation etc.⁵³ and corporeal gestures including the facial expressions such as pout, grimace, glower etc. that accompany the former.

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49 Cf. VP. 2. 238; the categorization of a *vākya* into components is performed only for the 'ease' (*upalālana* / *vyutpādana*) of beginners studying the *vākya* analysis, as Bhartṛhari clearly stresses, but not because they are inherently 'divisible' or 'composite entities' in practice.

50 VP. 2. 423, 424 .

51 VP. 2. 9, 352.

52 VP. 2. 351.

53 The only exception is his interest in the role of accent (*svara*) in meaning determination.

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